

Standpoint

by Assoc. Prof. Irinka Atanasova Hristova, PhD in Public Health

University of Rousse Angel Kanchev Faculty of Public Health and Health Care, Department of Health Care,

Member of the Scientific Jury according to Order No. R-109-119 of 15.02.2023 of

The Rector of Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov - Varna

Subject: Dissertation work on the topic: "Optimization of health care in oncological patients, through the assessment of distress".

Field of higher education 7. Healthcare and sports, professional field 7.4. Public health and scientific major "Management of health care".

Author: Martina Stoyanova Ivanova, full-time doctoral student, Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov - Varna, Faculty of Public Health

Research supervisor: Assoc. Stanislava Pavlova Peneva, MD

Scientific consultant: Assoc. Dr. Nikolay Vladimirov Tsonev, MD

Data on the procedure: By order of the Rector of the Medical University - Varna No. R-109-58 of 01.02.2019, Martina Ivanova was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the doctoral program "Health Care Management". Based on the Order of the Rector of the Medical University - Varna No. R-109-119 of 15.02.2023 she was dismissed with the right of defence.

Professional background and career development

In 2013, Martina Stoyanova Ivanova graduated from the Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov - Varna, educational qualification degree Bachelor, Major Nursing. In 2002, she acquired the educational qualification degree Master in Health Care Management at the same university. Her professional activity began as a nurse in the Neurosurgical Clinic at the St. Anna AD - Varna, where she worked from 2013 to 2014. From 2014 and at present, she works in the Medical Oncology Clinic at University Multiprofile Hospital for Active Treatment St. Marina EAD - Varna, since 2015 she has been working as a senior nurse.

From 2016 and at present, she leads the clinical practice of the Nurse and Midwife Majors at the Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov - Varna, and since 2019, practical exercises in the subjects "Nursing care for patients with somatic diseases", "Nursing care for patients with oncological diseases" and "Palliative nursing care"

She is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals.

Research characteristics of dissertation work

Relevance of dissertation work

It has been proven that oncological diseases are a severe test both for patients and their relatives, as well as for the health care system. The efforts of world medical science to find effective means of treatment for cancer patients date back a long time, and continue today to find more

effective and more affordable methods of treatment. The assessment of distress in oncological patients and the optimization of health care is an extremely topical topic in medical science. Cancer is a serious problem that affects millions of people worldwide, and they often experience significant distress related to the disease and its treatment. The performed scientific and applied research can make a real contribution to improving the quality of life and improving the results of the treatment of oncological patients. The dissertation focuses on an important and current aspect of the treatment of oncological patients.

Structure and characteristics of dissertation work

The total volume of the dissertation work is 186 pages, structured in five chapters with relevant conclusions after each chapter. It includes 66 figures, 8 tables and 6 applications. The list of references consists of 226 sources, of which 54 in Cyrillic, 172 in Latin, 45 % of which were published after 2010.

The first chapter, with a volume of 36 pages, examines distress in patients diagnosed with oncological diseases and its impact on the health and emotional state of patients and their relatives. The assessment of the level of distress is important for the early identification of risk groups and improvement of medical treatment. Nurses have an essential role in the distress assessment and must take the necessary measures in response to the screening results to create the appropriate conditions for future actions in implementing the plan of care. The role of the nurse in the assessment of distress in oncological patients has not yet been comprehensively studied in Bulgaria.

The holistic approach to oncological health care means looking at the patient as a person, not just a set of symptoms and diseases. This includes an assessment of the patient's physical, psychological, social and spiritual health and the relationship between these aspects. A holistic approach to cancer health care can help reduce patients' stress and anxiety and improve their quality of life. In addition, it can contribute to better treatment results and a better outlook for these patients.

From the structure and content of the information presented in the first chapter, it can be concluded that the doctoral student has in-depth knowledge of the topic of the problem under consideration. She has selected relevant scientific sources and skilfully synthesized and analyzed them to support her claims and present her scientific argumentation. This demonstrates her competence in the field of the research topic and her ability to extract meaningful information from the scientific literature.

In the second chapter, the methodology of the scientific research is presented, including the goal, tasks, working hypotheses, organization, time and place of the experiment, research methods. The instrumentation used in the study is presented in detail. The purpose of the dissertation research is clearly stated. For its implementation, 8 tasks are presented, which precisely reflect the research work of the doctoral student. The volume of the study was determined - 374 patients, 200 family members of patients and 23 nurses, place and time of performance. The characteristics of the observational signs are described in detail. The stages of the research work are presented in tabular form and reflect the specific activities and the time frame of their implementation. A wide range of sociological, pedagogical and statistical methods have been used to allow for valuable measurements and conclusions to be made..

In **the third chapter**, with a volume of 35 pages, the results and discussion of the conducted research are presented. The research is aimed at assessing the levels of distress in cancer patients and their relatives, and for the first time in Bulgaria, the relationships between the levels of distress and the assessment of everyday life and communication with relatives were analyzed by using the Distress Thermometer.

The research also includes an assessment of the levels of distress in relatives of cancer patients. By assisting the patient's relatives in caring for the patient and assessing the presence of distress in the relatives, nurses could provide care, make recommendations, educate and counsel their oncology patients, through their relatives. In this regard, the schematic model that is presented demonstrates the assessment of the need for specific care and the interaction between "nurse - patient - relatives of the patient".

The relationship between various aspects of patients' lives – practical, family, emotional, physical, spiritual/religious – and their level of distress was explored and analyzed. Based on the data obtained from the observation of the patient's behavioural reactions during the hospitalization period, a *Profile of the patient* during hospitalization is presented, which can help to better assess the condition of patients and improve their care. It also emphasizes the importance of collecting information from the nurse about the patients' condition and applying an individual approach in nursing care.

Conducting face-to-face interviews with oncology nurses is an effective way to obtain information from health care professionals. The interview covers essential topic areas that contribute to a better understanding of the significance of survey results, the use of the distress thermometer, and the effectiveness of patient self-report distress instruments.

In **the fourth chapter**, using the analysis of literature sources and the results of the study, practical approaches to improve health care are developed. The results of the conducted study help to offer practical guidelines for optimizing nursing care for patients with distress and the possibilities of integrating them into clinical practice. This includes the development of the Stages of Distress Assessment, coupled with a schematic model for 'Professional Oncological Nursing Behavior' and 'Oncological Distress Assessment Cycle' based on Professional Nursing Behavior and the 'Patient Pathway'.

The fifth chapter presents the conclusions, recommendations and contributions of the dissertation work, and the conclusions of the scientific research carried out are clearly stated and correspond to the set goals, tasks and scientific hypotheses. The recommendations that were made as a result of the conducted scientific study with the aim of optimizing health care for oncological patients are aimed at the institutions in the field of education and health care in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Scientific and scientific-applied contributions

The dissertation research is distinguished by its originality and significant contribution to the scientific community, it represents original and innovative research that contributes to the creation of new knowledge in the field of oncological health care.

I accept the reference of the contributions reflecting real achievements as systematized by the author.

The abstract is in a volume of 80 pages, compiled in accordance with the requirements and reflects the content of the dissertation work. It is illustrated with tables and figures that present the information in a clear and concrete way.

In connection with the dissertation work, 3 scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation research, published in scientific journals and proceedings of scientific conferences, are presented.

Personal impressions

I do not know Martina Ivanova personally. However, her professional career as a nurse, continuous training and improvement establish her as a tutor with very good potential and interests in research work in the field of health care. The holistic approach applied by the PhD student in her dissertation research particularly impresses me, considering the challenges of applying it in the context of health care in Bulgaria.

Conclusion

The dissertation work of Martina Ivanova is focused on a current issue in the field of health care, namely the optimization of the care provided for oncological patients, by using the Distress Thermometer. The aim of the dissertation research has been successfully achieved and all tasks have been completed. Conclusions are clearly formulated, presented accurately and comprehensively. The achieved contributions have significant scientific and practical value. Scientific publications submitted by the author meet all requirements.

The materials provided to me are sufficient to meet the criteria and requirements of the National Center for Information and Documentation. All this gives me reason to confidently give a positive assessment and I consider that Martina Stoyanova Ivanovo's dissertation meets all the requirements for awarding a scientific and educational degree "PhD".

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Rousse



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